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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - LEBANON - SYRIA U.S. DIPLOMACY

PARIS - THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

1. LEBANON - SYRIA
2. U.S. DIPLOMACY

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

FRONT PAGES ARE OVERWHELMINGLY DEVOTED TO THE LEBANESE PEOPLE'S ANGER TOWARD SYRIA AFTER THE ASSASSINATION OF RAFIK HARIRI: "ANTI-SYRIAN ANGER" (LE FIGARO); "ANTI-SYRIAN REVOLT" (LIBERATION); "ANGER RISING IN BEIRUT AGAINST SYRIA" (LA CROIX); "LEBANON REBELS AGAINST SYRIA" (FRANCE SOIR).

IN COMMENTARIES, EDITORS EMPHASIZE SYRIA'S AMBIGUOUS PAST, THE DANGERS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS AND THE NEW ALLIANCE BETWEEN PARIS AND WASHINGTON OVER THE UN RESOLUTION ON SYRIA. (SEE PART C)

IN POPULAR RIGHT-OF-CENTER FRANCE SOIR RESEARCHER BARAH MIKAIL OF IRIS (INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AND STRATEGIC RELATIONS) SAYS: "MANY PLAYERS IN THE REGION CAN PROFIT FROM DESTABILIZING LEBANON. OUT OF ALL OF THESE, SYRIA IS THE ONE THAT HAS THE LEAST TO GAIN FROM THIS ASSASSINATION. IT IS VERY INTERESTING TO SEE HOW PARIS AND WASHINGTON DEAL WITH SYRIA AND WHY. WITH THE UN RESOLUTION, PARIS WANTS TO IMPOSE THE EU AS A PLAYER IN THE MIDDLE EAST; THIS IS WHY IT IS TRYING TO GET CLOSE TO THE U.S. IN THE REGION. FOR THEIR PART, THE AMERICANS AREN'T VERY INTERESTED IN WHAT HAPPENS IN LEBANON. BUT THEY ARE INCREASING THEIR PRESSURE ON DAMASCUS BECAUSE OF SYRIA'S INFLUENCE OVER IRAQ. IRAQ IS THEIR PRIORITY. THE CRISIS IN LEBANON GIVES THEM A PRETEXT TO BARE THEIR TEETH." IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION, LEBANON'S FORMER PRESIDENT, AMINE GEMAYEL SAYS: "ONE CAN SIN THROUGH THOUGHT, ACTION OR OMISSION. IF SYRIA DID NOT SIN BY ITS ACTIONS, IT CERTAINLY HAS COMMITTED THE SIN OF OMISSION."

IN LEFT-OF-CENTER WEEKLY LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR EDITORIALIST JEAN DANIEL COMMENTS ON SECRETARY RICE'S SPEECH IN PARIS AND AMERICA'S DESIRE TO "CHANGE THE WORLD." (SEE PART C)

ALSO IN LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR CORRESPONDENT VINCENT JAUVERT WRITES A REPORT ON THE BUSH-CHIRAC RELATIONSHIP, WHICH HE CALLS: "CORDIAL MISTRUST." IN REGIONAL OUEST FRANCE, PIERRE DE CHARENTENAY WRITES ABOUT THE FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AMERICA AND EUROPE: "SINCE WE ARE ON SUCH DIFFERENT PATHS, HOW CAN DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND FRANCE BE SERENE?" (SEE PART C)

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

LEBANON - SYRIA

"SYRIA'S POWER PLAY"

GERARD DUPUY IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION (02/17): "THE SYRIANS KNOW EXACTLY WHAT THE LEBANESE THINK ABOUT THEM. DAMASCUS'S INTENTION WAS PROBABLY TO PREVENT THE LEBANESE FROM MAKING THEIR FEELINGS KNOWN IN THE COMING ELECTIONS. THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT'S REJECTION OF AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ASSASSINATION WILL NOT QUELL THE ALMOST UNANIMOUS ACCUSATIONS AGAINST SYRIA. ALMOST UNANIMOUS, BECAUSE THE ANGER AND INDIGNATION FELT ALL AROUND HAS NOT DETERRED THE RUSSIAN DEFENSE MINISTER FROM CONFIRMING THE SALE OF CONTROVERSIAL WEAPONS TO DAMASCUS, OR THE IRANIAN VICE-PRESIDENT TO EXPRESS HIS SOLIDARITY WITH SYRIA. THIS IS JUST A REMINDER THAT THE SYRIANS HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN HOW TO USE THE REGIONAL POLITICAL PLAYERS TO THEIR OWN END. WITH THE IRAQI ELECTIONS OVER, THE SHIITE MOVEMENT MAY WELL NOW HAVE AT ITS DISPOSAL TERRITORIAL CONTINUITY STRETCHING FROM KHORASSAN TO THE BEKAA VALLEY. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE ASSASSINATION OF HARIRI, FOR THE PERPETRATORS THEMSELVES, HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH A LOCAL CRIME, BUT IS RATHER A FORM OF REGIONAL BLACKMAIL IN THE MIDDLE EAST. SYRIA CAN STILL PROVE ITS INNOCENCE BY COMPLYING WITH RESOLUTION 1559. OTHERWISE THE WEST WILL HAVE TO PUT ITS MONEY WHERE ITS MOUTH IS." "RE-ACQUAINTANCE"

BRUNO FRAPPAT IN CATHOLIC LA CROIX (02/17): "IT IS MUCH TOO SOON TO SAY WHETHER HARIRI'S FUNERAL WILL MARK THE BEGINNING OF SYRIA'S WITHDRAWAL FROM LEBANON AND LEBANON'S RE-ACQUAINTANCE WITH ITSELF. HARIRI'S DEATH HAS ALSO ALLOWED FRANCE AND THE U.S. TO RE-AFFIRM THEIR ENTENTE OVER THE ONLY POSSIBLE OUTCOME TO THE CRISIS: SYRIA'S DEPARTURE. BUT SYRIA IS A HEREDITARY DICTATORSHIP, AND DICTATORSHIPS, ONCE THEY ARE LOCKED IN THEIR BUNKERS, HAVE A HARD TIME LISTENING."

U.S. DIPLOMACY

"CHANGING THE WORLD"
JEAN DANIEL IN LEFT-OF-CENTER WEEKLY LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR (02/17): "THE PHRASE I FOUND MOST REVEALING IN SECRETARY RICE'S SPEECH IN PARIS WAS HER LYRICAL CALL 'TO CHANGE THE WORLD.' AT THAT POINT I BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND WHAT DONALD RUMSFELD MEANT WHEN HE SPOKE ABOUT 'OLD EUROPE.' IT IS TRUE THAT EUROPEANS WANT TO PROTECT AND REFORM THE WORLD, NOT CHANGE IT. SECRETARY RICE'S MESSIANIC FAITH IN DEMOCRACY AND HER DETERMINATION TO SAVE THE WORLD BY EXPORTING DEMOCRACY ILLUSTRATE HOW MUCH OF AN AMERICAN SHE IS. SHE DOES CONCEDE THAT DEMOCRACY CANNOT BE 'IMPOSED' FROM THE OUTSIDE. BUT THIS IS JUST A TRICK., BECAUSE ONE CAN ALWAYS FIND A GROUP OF OPPONENTS TO SUPPORT AND DECIDE THEY ARE A REPRESENTATIVE GROUP. WHILE SECRETARY RICE IS RIGHT TO SHOW SATISFACTION FOR THE FREE ELECTIONS IN AFGHANISTAN, PALESTINE AND IRAQ, SHE DID NOT SAY WHETHER THE LOSS OF HUMAN LIVES AND THE TRAUMA MIGHT HAVE BEEN LESSENED. MOSTLY SHE FORGOT TO SAY WHETHER THE LEADERS OF A NATION WHO HAVE LIED. ARE THE BEST PLACED TO PUT THEMSELVES FORWARD AS AN EXAMPLE TO CIVILIZATIONS DEEMED TO BE INFERIOR."

"AMERICAN ASSERTION AND EUROPEAN DOUBTS"
PIERRE DE CHARENTENAY IN REGIONAL OUEST-FRANCE (02/17): "SINCE WE ARE ON SUCH DIFFERENT PATHS, HOW CAN DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND FRANCE BE SERENE? IN FACT NOT ONLY ARE WE SEPARATED BY DIFFERENT POLICIES, WE ARE ALSO SEPARATED BY DIFFERENT CULTURES, ON ONE SIDE ACTION AND ON THE OTHER SIDE INTROSPECTION AND DISCUSSION, WITH ALL THE HESITATIONS THAT COME WITH THEM. THIS DOESN'T MEAN THAT AMERICAN CERTAINTY HAS A BETTER FUTURE TO OFFER THAN EUROPEAN DOUBTS. THE ISOLATION OF THE UNITED STATES WILL ONLY LEAD TO AN OVERLOAD OF RESPONSIBILITIES. MANY BOOKS HAVE ALREADY PREDICTED, MAYBE A BIT SOON, THE END OF AMERICA'S LEADERSHIP. CONVERSELY, EUROPEAN UNCERTAINTIES ARE BUILT ON LAW AND EXPECTATIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT WHICH ARE THE CORNERSTONES FOR BUILDING THE FUTURE, AND ON A SENSE OF COMMUNITY THAT OFFERS A LIFESTYLE THAT SO MANY STRIVE FOR. BY REFUSING THE PATH TO POWER, THE EUROPEANS ARE PROBABLY CHOOSING THE ONE TO ENDURANCE. BEFORE NEXT WEEK'S MEETING BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND FRANCE, ONE CAN MAKE TWO PROPOSALS: THAT THE UNITED STATES WONDER ABOUT ITS DREAM AND THAT EUROPE MAKE NO SECRET OF ITS WILLINGNESS TO ACT WITH MORE DETERMINATION." LEACH